In the Specification:

Please amend the specification as shown:

Please delete the paragraph on page 234, lines 1-9 and replace it with the following paragraph:

The assay is run in Corning white half-area 96-well plates (VWR 29444-312 [Corning 3693]) with full-length NS3 HCV protease 1b tethered with NS4A cofactor (final enzyme concentration 1 to 15 nM). The assay buffer is complemented with 10 µM NS4A cofactor Pep 4A (Anaspec 25336 or in-house, MW 1424.8). RET S1 (Ac-Asp-Glu-Asp(EDANS)-Glu-Glu-Abu-[COO]Ala-Ser-Lys-(DABCYL)-NH_2 **(SEQ ID NO: 1)**, AnaSpec 22991, MW 1548.6) is used as the fluorogenic peptide substrate. The assay buffer contained 50 mM Hepes at pH 7.5, 30 mM NaCl and 10 mM BME. The enzyme reaction is followed over a 30 minutes time course at room temperature in the absence and presence of inhibitors.

Please delete the paragraph on page 234, lines 11-13 and replace it with the following paragraph:

The peptide inhibitors HCV Inh 1 (Anaspec 25345, MW 796.8) Ac-Asp-Glu-Met-Glu-Glu-Cys-OH **(SEQ ID NO: 2)**, [-20^{0}C] and HCV Inh 2 (Anaspec 25346, MW 913.1) Ac-Asp-Glu-Dif-Cha-Cys-OH **(SEQ ID NO: 3)**, were used as reference compounds.

Please delete the paragraph on page 234, line 19 to page 235, line 4 and replace it with the following paragraph:

Quantification of HCV replicon RNA in cell lines (HCV Cell Based Assay)

Cell lines, including Huh-11-7 or Huh 9-13, harboring HCV replicons (Lohmann, et al Science 285:110-113, 1999) are seeded at $5x10^3$ cells/well in 96 well plates and fed media containing DMEM (high glucose), 10% fetal calf serum, penicillin-streptomycin and non-essential amino acids. Cells are incubated in a 5% CO_2 incubator at 37 °C. At the end of the incubation period, total RNA is extracted and purified from cells using Qiagen Rneasy 96 Kit (Catalog No. 74182). To amplify the HCV RNA so that sufficient material can be detected by an HCV specific probe (below), primers specific for HCV (below) mediate both the reverse transcription of the HCV RNA and the amplification of the cDNA by polymerase chain reaction (PCR) using the TaqMan One-Step RT-PCR Master Mix Kit (Applied Biosystems catalog no. 4309169). The nucleotide sequences of the RT-PCR primers, which are located in the NS5B region of the HCV genome, are the following:

HCV Forward primer "RBNS5bfor"

5'GCTGCGGCCTGTCGAGCT **(SEQ ID NO: 4)**:

HCV Reverse primer "RBNS5Brev":

5'CAAGGTCGTCTCCGCATAC **(SEQ ID NO: 5)**

Please delete the paragraph on page 235, lines 19-22 and replace it with the following paragraph:

The RT-PCR product was detected using the following labeled probe:

5' FAM-CGAAGCTCCAGGACTGCACGATGCT-TAMRA **(SEQ ID NO: 6)**

FAM= Fluorescence reporter dye.

TAMRA:=Quencher dye.